

December 2012



# CASA of Pinal County– *The PAPR*

## Happy Holidays!

**A NEWS“PAPR” TO INSPIRE POSITIVE ACTION, POWERFUL RESULTS**



### First Annual Pinal County Adoption Day!

The Pinal County Superior Court hosted a major event that led to the best possible outcome for 31 dependent children and their adoptive families November 3rd, 2012. For the first time, Pinal County held a formal adoption day in which 22 separate adoptions took place over a two hour period! This event involved many different people and organizations and included family portraits, food, entertainment, certified copies of the adoptions, public speeches and most importantly, closure for these children. These children now have forever families and can move on with life, knowing where they will be staying and growing up!

Special thanks goes out to many people who helped organize this event, including: Pam Burke, Donna McBride, Judge Oldham, Commissioner Raymond, Commissioner Ratliff, Pinal County Attorney's Office, Arizona Attorney General's Office, Chad Roche-Clerk of the Superior Court and staff, Arizona Children's Association, AZPAC, Foster Care Review Board, Delana Fuller, Tamera Shanker, Probation staff, CASA volunteers, Court Staff, Central Arizona College volunteers, Pinal County Juvenile Court Community Advisory Board, John Aulick– Photography and volunteers from the Community. Thank you all! We are looking forward to working with everyone again during next year's 2nd Annual Adoption Day.

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## Learning our Court System– Integrated Family Court



We all are familiar with Juvenile Dependency cases or “JD” matters, but did you know that a CASA can also be assigned to a child who is facing delinquent (criminal) charges in a “JV” matter? As a policy, we assign CASA volunteers to dependent children. Sometimes, however, a dependent child also commits crimes. We also have dependent children who are in custody in our juvenile detention facility due to delinquent activity and/or for their protection.

Unfortunately, many of these families are dealing with multiple problems and a great deal of stress. Sometimes the stress of everything leads to legal separations, child custody issues, child support and divorce. With all of these issues involving the family, many children and the parents found themselves appearing in multiple courts on different days with different judges. The outcome was often conflicting court orders and confusion overall as well as the inconvenience for the families. Collectively, these multiple cases were taking a tremendous amount of time from the court calendar.

Two counties in Arizona (Pinal and Coconino) are trying to make things more convenient and logical for the families through what is called Integrated Family Court (IFC). Currently Judge White and Judge Oldham hear these cases on Mondays and Wednesdays but place these hearings later in the afternoon around 3:30 PM. The cases are a little more complex and involve many different interested parties in the dependency and delinquent matters that involve the child. Variations could also include divorces, child custody, child support and visitation issues as well as the Dependency matter.

We currently have volunteers who are working cases that involve IFC court. If you are interested in learning more about IFC, contact your CASA coordinator or our Department IFC Coordinator Teresa Hermosillo—Horne at 520-866-7077.

## CPS– Limited Resources in Times of Higher Numbers

We have had a couple inquiries in reference to services being cut by CPS via their contracted providers. In one of our volunteer’s experience, the provider had just laid off 14 employees, including the one that was providing transportation services in her case.

According to an article posted on *azcentral.com* on 12/11/12, the reporter indicated that CPS is facing major cuts in key areas of dependency matters in terms of providing services to families. Most impacted services include supervised family visits, transportation, and parent aides. The article noted concerns that these conditions could lead to children being left in foster care for longer periods of time.

According to the article, the problem has arisen due to CPS’s current budget not accounting for nearly a 25% increase in the number of foster children in comparison to the prior year, and the Department’s efforts to work within their current budget. This has resulted in CPS not being able to authorize providers to provide an increased number of services to match the increased demand for services.

Our office has made attempts to get some additional clarification from CPS on this topic and the potential impact and we will be sure to forward updates to volunteers as we receive additional information. In the meantime, if you have any questions and/or are experiencing any problems in this area, please contact your CASA Coordinator so we can work together with CPS to address any potential concerns.

The referenced *azcentral.com* article can be found at the following link:

<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/20121211arizona-cps-strapped-poised-cut-key-services.html?>

## PCCI / Elks Foster Care Christmas Party

December 8th was a special day in Pinal County, with respect to volunteer organizations trying to give back to foster children in Pinal County. The annual PCCI/Elks Foster Care Children Christmas Party was a huge success, thanks to the hard work of many service oriented groups/individuals that included the Caliente Clowns, Child Protective Services, Soroptimist Club of Gold Canyon, the Pinal County Sheriff's Office, Judge Kevin White, Court staff, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Sheriff Paul Babeu and his staff, and many others!

Foster children from all over Pinal County were invited to attend this special event that included music, entertainment, a delicious hot meal and a gift from Santa and Mrs. Claus. Several CASA volunteers were able to bring their CASA child to the party.

Each year Santa makes a special entrance by PCSO helicopter, which excites the crowd- but then leaves the party courtesy of PCSO patrol staff!

Someone pointed out the Mrs. Claus looks strikingly similar to CASA Volunteer Ann Dessert!



## Getting to Know Local Resources: Arizona Children's Association



The Arizona Children's Association (ACA) is a large organization that operates in every county in Arizona. They provide over 40 different programs that help improve the lives of foster children, foster families and also provide many different training opportunities. Major focus involves permanency, intervention and prevention in the child welfare system. The Arizona Children's Association has long been involved in Pinal County and our court system.

Some of ACA services include:

1. Child Family Team (CFT) Meeting facilitation
2. Home Certifications
3. Adoption Certifications
4. Foster Parent Training/Certification
5. Support Groups for Foster/Adoption Parents.

As a CASA, it can be very helpful to become a little more familiar with this large organization. These services can help you and help foster parents/adoptive parents, but more importantly, can help your CASA child. The services provided by ACA are many- too many to cover in the limited space of this newsletter! We highly recommend our CASA volunteers visit the Arizona Children's Association website at the following link:

[azchildrens.org](http://azchildrens.org)



## Training Resource: iTunes University

CASA Program requirements include 12 hours of continuous education credits per year and many of our volunteers have used the state CASA website to satisfy this requirement. That being said, we want to mention an additional online opportunity for volunteers that is absolutely free. The Apple Corporation has been working with many higher learning institutions around the world to offer free education to lifelong learners. The beautiful thing about this opportunity is that you can get world-class education from institutions like Stanford University, Harvard University, Open University (U.K.) and many community colleges around the nation and Canada absolutely free.

To access this information you will need to download iTunes to your personal computer, Mac or iPad at no charge from the following website: <http://www.apple.com/itunes/download/>.

You will then have to register with Apple by creating a username and password. After that, you are on your way. iTunes, of course, is a great way to organize music but now is a source for world class free education on hundreds of topics to include child development, psychology, social work, and many other beneficial topics. While you won't get actual college credits, you will be getting actual college learning free of charge that will also count towards your annual CASA training requirements.

If you elect to use iTunes U to complete your training hours, please be sure and document your learning in your contact logs! Being a life long learner allows us to better serve children and the court.

Questions? Please contact CASA Coordinator-Greg Clark at 520.866.7078.

## Upcoming Training Opportunity



**Topic:** Sally Campbell Memorial Best for Babies Seminar, Court Teams for Infants and Toddlers: Integrating the Science of Early Childhood and Child Welfare  
**Date:** Friday, February 22, 2013  
**Time:** 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.  
**Location:** Sandra Day O'Connor School of Law, Arizona State University, Tempe  
**Featuring:** Sheree L. Toth, PhD

If you are interested in attending this seminar, please contact the CASA office. We are putting together a roster of CASA volunteers interested in attending and we will be applying for scholarships on your behalf. We will be sending out more information in January.

### Save the Date

**CASA of Pinal County, County-wide Training**

Saturday, March 16, 2013

9.00am-2:00pm

Florence

**Speaker: Becky Ruffner, Prevent Child Abuse, Arizona**

**More information coming soon!**



## Thank You Volunteers!



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Our own CASA volunteer, Vince Vitale, was recently interviewed in an article from *In-Maricopa.com* about his work as a volunteer advocate. Vince has been a wonderful addition to the CASA Program and we greatly appreciate the time and energy that he has devoted in his cases. It's a great article about Vince and the work CASA volunteers do. To read the full article, please go to the following link: <http://www.inmaricopa.com/Print/Article/12370>.

Did you know Vince Vitale and his wife Judith Rich are also published authors? Check out their book: The Claimers: A Tale of Skullduggery on the Backstretch (available online from the publisher at: [horseracingpublications.com](http://horseracingpublications.com)). Thank you Vince for all your hard work and commitment to the CASA Program!

### Santa Will Find You No Matter Where You Are

*Submitted by Lydia Mercier, CASA Volunteer, CASA of Pinal County*

There is a young girl who has been in 'the system' for many years. She's been with one CASA for the last five years.

This child, now a teenager in years but much younger emotionally, tries to understand the complexity of her life and her lack of family.

She wonders why she can't have a real home with a Mom and a Dad.

She doesn't understand why she must collect dozens of stuffed puppies and cats and pretend they are real because, where she lives, kids can't have pets.

She tries to pretend that a particularly kind staff person is her "mother" and wants her peers to be her 'sisters' or 'cousins' but that doesn't work out.

Instead of Aunts, Parents, Cousins, a Grandmother or Grandpa, she has professional staff that she calls 'her team' .. hoping that a 'team' will somehow replace not having a family.

She knows she has a wonderful, caring team.

She understands that 'her team' makes decisions for her and is trying to find her an appropriate home.

But, it's Christmas Time and the other kids in her Residential Treatment Center have parents that come to visit; go out on passes; families that bring Christmas presents in to them.

She wonders if Santa will even remember where she is now; or even know that she wants boots for Christmas.

But "Santa" does know and with all his special helpers (PCCI volunteers, DDD case manager, CPS caseworkers, Therapists, and CASA will make sure this child, even as far away as she is right now) understands that she's never without people who work hard for her and want the best for her.

So "Santa" turned his sleigh temporarily into a Chevy Impala, loaded with gifts, and sent his Senior Elf (her CASA) to Albuquerque, New Mexico to spend another weekend with this little girl.



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"Families" are people who care about one another.

"Families" do not have to be from a blood-line, but rather are linked by love and caring from the hearts of many people... some that this child doesn't even know their name and may never meet.

In these days after the heart-breaking tragedy at the elementary school in Connecticut,  
we need to pause and remember how precious our children are; and what  
little time we have with them.

This Santa's Elf would like to thank all those 'other elves'  
that work all year long to better the lives of the thousands of children that are  
not with their families or are searching for families.

To All A Merry Christmas this year  
and continued success as we strive for 'our kids' next year... one child at a time!

P.S. Santa remembered the boots!!

*The CASA Program would like to thank Lydia for the great work she has done on her cases and her unending dedication to the Program. She has repeatedly gone above and beyond on her cases in addition to dedicating numerous hours to attending training to meet the individual needs of her cases. Thank you Lydia for all your hard work.*

### ***Reminder:***

***All CASA Volunteers are required to have 12 hours of training  
completed by 12/31/12.***

***If you have any questions about your hours and/or getting additional training, please  
contact your Coordinator or Gina Redmond at 520.866.7076.***



## **Ways to Help Foster Kids? Help recruit a new CASA Volunteer!**

As we are enjoying the holidays and soon will be starting the new year, our program is growing but so is our need to attract and maintain good committed people who feel strongly about helping a child in need.

The CASA teams at the state and county level help spread the word by participating in public event booths, presenting at community events, and pursuing many other avenues, but time and again we are finding the best approach to gain new volunteers is through our volunteers.

Perhaps you have a neighbor, co-worker, family member, or friend that you know that want to make a difference and would make a great volunteer?

Help make the introduction to CASA; with your assistance, we can help CASA—Pinal County grow and make a positive difference for the hundreds of children in our county that do not currently have a CASA.

Thank you for all your referrals and thank you all for all that you do for these children!

